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# Helps to Talk



How to get  
the most  
from a visit  
your doctor.

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# It Helps To Talk



How to get  
the most  
from a visit  
to your doctor.



Health  
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Canada

**So much to know, so little time.**

*"I always assume my doctor is too busy to talk about the things that worry me."*

*"I don't always tell my doctor everything. I am afraid to talk about certain things."*

*"I don't seem able to ask the right questions."*

*"Sometimes my questions are not answered. I feel like I don't have enough information."*

*"Sometimes I am given too much information. It's overwhelming."*

*"I pretend I understand when I really don't."*

*"I blurt out what worries me most when there is no time left to talk."*

*"When I leave, I am not always sure what my doctor wants me to do."*





## It helps to talk.

When you are ill and under stress, it is important to talk with your doctor about your concerns. Not only will it help you understand your treatment options, it can actually improve your physical and emotional wellbeing. It can even prevent unnecessary visits down the road.

We know it can be hard dealing with complicated medical decisions, especially when your doctor's time is limited. Here are some ways to help you both understand your needs and where you want your treatment to go.

## Before your visit, be ready

- 1. Ask a friend to go with you.** This can make the visit less stressful for you. A friend can take notes, ask questions you may not think of and help you remember what the doctor says. Spend time before the visit talking about what you would like them to do.
- 2. Write down your concerns and questions in advance.** When you are in the doctor's office, it can be hard to remember all the details of your problem. Sit quietly and write them down before you go. Add any questions you want to ask, the medications you are taking and any family history that may be relevant. *Remember to take the list with you when you go.*

## At the doctor's office, be clear

1. **Ask your most important questions early in the visit.** That way, the doctor can focus first on what you most want to know. Go over your list together and see if you will need a follow-up visit to cover all your concerns.
2. **Take notes.** This will help you remember what the doctor says. If a friend is with you, have them take notes while you focus on listening and asking questions.
3. **Tell the doctor as much as you can.** Not just your physical symptoms, but your thoughts and feelings as well. It will help your doctor to know anything that may affect your decisions or reactions to the suggested investigations or treatment. For example:
  - What do you think is wrong? Are you worried by what you know or have heard about this illness?
  - What do you know about treatments for this illness? Are you concerned about how it may affect your everyday life?
  - Is there anything about your home, family or work situation that will decide the treatment you choose and how well you stick to it?

**4. Ask the doctor as much as you feel you need.** The more you understand, the more your doctor can help, but too much information can be confusing. So do make your needs clear. For example:

- Want to know more? *"I will feel better if I know as much as possible. Is there something more you can tell me? Can I see my test results? Do you have material I can take away and read?"*
- Want to know less? *"I know this is all important, but I'm getting confused. Can we focus on what I need to know now, and talk about the rest another time?"*

**5. If you don't understand, say so.** Ask the doctor to explain medical words or repeat things in plain language. Ask for a sketch or illustration that explains your illness, treatments or tests.

**6. Repeat what you think the doctor said, in your own words.** This can clear up confusion, make sure you don't miss important points and help you remember instructions.

**7. Ask for a written treatment plan.** If you feel your own notes are not enough, have your doctor write down instructions for you.

**8. Don't be afraid to ask for a second opinion.** Your doctor will be happy to have you confirm the results if it makes you feel better about your treatment.

## When you get home, consider what was said

1. **Review the visit.** To remember clearly what you and your doctor talked about, review the notes that you or your friend took during the visit.
2. **Keep a journal.** This can become a valuable reference. Write down what you learn from your doctor, other people or your own reading. Make a note of your symptoms, prescribed medications, reactions to treatment, and questions as they occur. Read them over before your next visit.
3. **Learn some basic medical terms.** This will help you follow your progress and manage your care. Ask the doctor for a booklet that has a glossary.
4. **Get more information if you need it.** If you are concerned about your results and the options the doctor has given you, find out more before making a decision. Talk it over with your family or your primary care physician. Get a second opinion if it makes you feel more comfortable. Then make another appointment with the doctor when you have had time to think.

P.S. If you really feel that you and your doctor do not have good rapport, remember you have a right to change doctors if you wish.



## Feeling overwhelmed?

Please say so.

Tell your doctor what is making you feel uncomfortable and offer to work together to make it better.

**Too many questions?** *"I know you need this information but I am feeling overwhelmed with your questions. Please give me time to understand them so I can give you accurate answers."*

**Too much information?** *"I know I need this information but I can't take it all in right now. Can we make another appointment for a longer talk?"*

**Rushed to make a decision?** *"I feel I need a few days to think this over before deciding. Can we talk again?"*

**Too worried to focus?** *"I am really concerned about what this will do to my family. It's hard to concentrate on what you are telling me right now."*

**Confused about treatment?** *"I'm not sure what you want me to do when I leave here. Can we go over it again?"*

**Need additional help?** Do you need specific information that your doctor cannot provide, or extra emotional support for yourself and your family? Ask your doctor to help you arrange a meeting with someone qualified to help.

Questions to consider before your next visit:

What would you like to know by the end of your next visit?

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What are your most important questions?

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What other concerns do you have?

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*Our mission is to help the people of Canada  
maintain and improve their health.*

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Également offert en français sous le titre  
C'est bon d'en parler - Guide du patient

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Publications  
Health Canada,  
Postal Locator 0900C2  
Ottawa, Ontario,  
K1A 0K9

Tel.: (613) 954-5995 Fax: (613) 941-5366

This publication is also available on the Internet at the  
following address:

<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca>

This publication can also be made available in/on computer  
diskette/large print/audio-cassette/braille upon request.

Published by authority of the Minister of Health

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Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada, 2000

H39-517/2-1999 E  
ISBN: 0-662-28287-6









